

244 West Princes Street  
Glasgow G4 9DP  
Scotland  
041 334 7388

8th June, 1989

Alan Fountain  
Channel Four  
Charlotte Street  
London

Dear Alan Fountain,

I am not sure whether or not you will know my name, I'm a novelist and short story writer (my most recent novel A Disaffection received fair publicity). Don Coutts gave me your address and telephone number and recommended I make contact with you as soon as possible on the following matter:

On January 10th, 11th and 12th here in Glasgow myself and others are holding a three day event - strictly nonacademic though academics attending under their own steam will be as welcome as anyone, almost - under the general heading "Self Determination and Power", subheadings "a life task, a political task" "tradition and existence". The key speech takes place on the Wednesday and the speaker will be Noam Chomsky with whom I have been corresponding.

We hope for a participating group of some 250 to 300 people, most of whom will be there by invitation. Alongside Chomsky there shall be other guest speakers; it is hoped that these will include such names as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, George Davie, June Jordan, Jerome Rothenberg, Tom Leonard, Adonis, Christa Woolf; essentially writers who have in common that their work extends toward 'tradition-bearing' where this has become an active struggle in one way or another. Ngugi is a good example at present; nowadays he writes exclusively in the language of his own cultural group (Gikuyu), and his latest novel is banned in Kenya - apparently the government there tried to arrest the central character in it, before discovering the life was a fiction. An aspect of this is the line concerning selfhood/nationhood and independence, where colonial rule has been followed by neocolonial rule. So far are the Kenyan authorities from allowing a person the 'right' of self determination the powers-that-be have proscribed the 'right' of the artist to self expression, but this is the case in most countries of the world. The fight on behalf of cultural 'self determination' has been happening in literature for around 200 years. Unfortunately at a later stage the struggle occasionally degenerates from the affirmation of a language and/or culture to the point of tradition at all costs, especially at that of the individual, i.e. tradition at the

expense of existence, where art becomes simply heritage; and from there the path spirals downwards into 'blood and soil' politics, the 'purity' of a language becoming the 'purity' of a race, and so on.

The majority of the people invited to participate for the three days (Chomsky is staying for both the Wednesday and the Thursday) will be activists in one way or another, usually in local politics, eg. tenants groups, the anti-poll tax organisers, anti-racist groups, women's self help groups etc.; it will also include people invited from outside Scotland and elsewhere - I hope someone from the Leningrad '82 writers' group (writers who aren't part of the official Writers' Union) will take part, also representatives from UMOJA, the A.N.C. Thus a number of folk directly involved in diverse self determining activities will be drawn together, the intention being that space and time are given over to an exchange of knowledge, experience, information etc., that general points will emerge through process.

Once Chomsky has given his key address on the Wednesday forenoon, a reply or addendum of some sort will come from somebody who is fairly well known in Scottish public life - someone aware not only of Chomsky's work in international politics but who has a grasp of his work in the study of language and philosophy in general. This person won't be an academic, thus consolidating the 'generalist' 'democratic intellect' feel to things, the sense that a genuine dissemination of knowledge is in process and that ordinary people (people who have not had higher education) are not being excluded from the discourse. After lunch all participants, including guest speakers, will be sectioned off into groups of around 15 to 20 individuals - the place we are situating the event (The Pierce Institute, Govan) has many different style rooms and areas where each group/workshop can hold their own forum. With luck some concrete things will emerge, and with more luck, bonds may be formed that go beyond the three day period. The 2nd and 3rd days are programmed similarly, with the other guests giving the opening talk each morning. In late afternoon a plenary discussion will also be led by one of the other invited guest speakers. In the evening there will be a concert; not only musicians will take part here but poets and prose writers who are used to performing their work in public - such names as Wally Serote, Kathy Acker, Alasdair Gray, Tom Raworth, Sorley Maclean, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mahmood Jamal will be invited.

We are still working out the details but the above represents where we are at present. The reason I have made contact with yourself concerns filming and the backing of it by Channel Four - I should also mention that Don is himself very keen on being involved. It occurred to myself and the other main organiser (Derek Rodger who edits the magazine THE SCOTTISH CHILD) that something based on the three day event would not only be exciting, because of the names involved it would be marketable in countries like Holland, Sweden, West Germany, U.S.A.,

Canada, possibly Cuba. The ideal slot would be the Eleventh Hour one, and the duration of the programme would be around the 1 hour 15 to 30 minute mark. If I was a filmmaker myself, at the risk of presumption, I would be wanting to go about for the three days and nights with the camera on my shoulder, maybe following the process through one or two of the small groups - the musicians and performance poets and prose writers from the evening concerts will also be asked to participate as ordinary group members.

Don has told me that budgets operate on an annual basis and that the year from April '89 to April '90 will already have been accounted for, but he also said there would be contingency funding available, if a project was considered exciting enough to warrant a special effort. We think this project is exactly that, and that it must be recorded; I hope you will give it a full consideration on behalf of Channel Four. I am aware that there is also the possibility of a development budget; is there something through the Scottish connection? Such a budget would allow for the expenses accruing on setting the event up, to include air travel, hotel fees and so on - around £5 to £8000 we estimate.

I rarely get to London these days, but towards the middle of next week I shall be there, and if it is convenient for you - and you are interested in discussing the matter further - we could meet for a brief chat about it. Thanks for your attention so far.

Yours sincerely,



James Kelman.



October 19, 1989  
Hotel Viru  
Tallinn, Estonia  
S.S.R.

To whom it May Concern:

I am a 20 year old American student. Today,  
I was approached by an Estonian man who asked  
me to mail a letter outside of the country for him.  
I was overwhelmed by the desperation: this  
man came up to a complete stranger and asked  
her to mail something that was obviously dear  
to him. After being in Tallinn only 3 days, we  
have heard the words: unjust, conquered, oppressed,  
"them", and other negative slurs countless times.  
For this reason, if it were up to me, I would  
give this plea for recognition top priority.  
I sincerely hope you will do the same.

Thank you for your consideration,



Jennifer Phillips  
University of Wisconsin-  
Madison

Внимание!  
Образец написания цифр индекса:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Free University  
c-o Transmission Gallery  
28 King St.  
Glasgow G1 5QP  
U. K.

Et frim.  
hafter  
hos sig

Куда \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Кому \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Индекс предприятия связи и адрес отправителя

Пишите индекс предприятия связи места назначения

Dr. organisers.

I'm one of the three elected leaders of the regional independent youth organisation in Tallinn. Our organisation is called Independent Unity of Tallinn /Tallinna Sõltumatu Malev/ and we are striving for total independence to Estonia. We are greatly interested to attend your gathering. We are ready to make a review or speech about Estonian independent youth movement (in English). If you accept our participation, please send us an official invitation, as soon as possible to the gathering and more information.

Our addresses:

1. Randam Feldberg  
Läänemere tee 23 -29  
200 039 Tallinn  
Estonia, USSR
2. Jaan Hatto  
Pärnu mnt 375  
200 009 Tallinn  
Estonia, USSR
3. Heikki Riim  
Kalinini 85 -12  
200 017 Tallinn  
Estonia, USSR

Please send the invitation to first address

With greetings from Tallinn

*Hatto* Hatto

Please send me the details  
of the Self-Determination Org—  
when you have them ready—  
We are the Men—are all in to  
performing — and if you give  
us posters to distribute or tickets  
to sell etc — please send  
them to us in plenty  
time — hope you'll well  
and look forward to seeing  
you soon — regards Jayne

from:  
JAYNE TAYLOR POST CARD  
FLAT 1/2  
52 CLEVELAND STREET  
CHARING CROSS  
GLASGOW G3 7AD  
SCOTLAND UK



ADDRESS

Jim Kelman  
~~to Maryhill Arts Centre~~  
~~Malloch Street~~  
~~Maryhill~~

~~G20~~  
244 WEST PRINCES ST  
GLASGOW  
G4 9DP.



21 November 1989

Mr James Kelman  
244 West Princes Street  
GLASGOW G4 9DP

*Dear Jim*

This is a brief informal letter to let you know that the Literature Committee decided, at its meeting last Friday, to offer a grant of £750 and a guarantee of £250 towards the event in January next year. I hope this will make things possible.

Perhaps I should say that the Committee was enthusiastic about the nature of the event and only critical, as I suspected, about what it considered to be the excessive proportion spent on general administration.

You will, of course, receive a formal offer letter in due course, and after this is formally accepted you will receive the grant element without further delay. If the guarantee requires to be called up, this can be considered on receipt of your statement of accounts.

With best wishes  
Yours sincerely

*Walter*

Walter Cairns  
Literature Director



16 February 1990

Mr James Kelman  
244 West Princes Street  
GLASGOW G4 9DP

*Dear Jim*

Many thanks for your letter of 5 February. I shall await developments and am confident that whatever you submit will be in order.

I enclose a cutting from the Tribune, which you may or may not have seen. Where do they get their information from? How is it possible to be so wrong? Ah well!....

Best wishes  
Yours sincerely

*Walter*

Walter Cairns  
Literature Director

# "OUTWRITE"

THE NIGHT before Noam Chomsky arrived in Glasgow last week to deliver his keynote address to the "Self-Determination and Power" event at the Pearce Institute in Govan, he dropped in on Edinburgh to give a talk at the university, organised by local Third World development groups. It was packed out, and people queued outside throughout in the hope that somebody might leave. The "Chomsky Event", as the Glasgow conference became known in local parlance, was similarly oversubscribed and enthusiastic. Chomsky spoke twice and spent most of the rest of his time being interviewed, by the press and by the collection of admirers whose efforts had brought him to Scotland. When asked to respond to a plenary session on the first day, he pointed out that he was "not an oracle". Later, he added that he sees his function as that of a lightning-rod, jetted in to conferences all around the world. His fame draws people of many affiliations together, he talks a bit then makes a tactical

withdrawal, leaving them to listen to each other instead.

The metaphor of lightning-rod applies not only to Chomsky's behaviour as a public speaker but also to the content of his political thinking. He considers all people to be born with "an instinct for freedom". The only obstacle to their giving vent to this instinct is that they are denied access to power,

## Noam Chomsky comes to Govan

crucially through being denied access to information about how government works and what it performs in the people's name.

The simplicity of this position sears through centuries of obscurantism, and is of course extremely unfashionable in the present post-modern philosophical climate. But the many objections that could be made as to first principles or ultimate ends are of no interest to Chomsky. For him, the point is that he can work to free the libertarian instinct, making available through books, essays and lectures an analysis of government – in particular the United States Government – as corrupt, strategically dishonest, often very stupid in the way it underestimates its populace and hence not all-powerful. "The really dangerous thing," as he said at one point, "would be if America produces a demagogue who is clever and interested in power alone. Reagan was just a clown and everybody knew perfectly well he was just a clown. Bush is only a manager. The Christian fundamentalist preachers are all so corrupt they aren't yet a problem. If somebody comes along who's clever and isn't interested in sex or money, we'll be in real trouble."

Chomsky's contributions, in form and content, hit political debate in Britain like a breath of fresh air – particularly in Scotland, where old socialist and nationalist mythologies run so thick as to become claustrophobic. When questioned about ideological allegiances, he said he couldn't call himself a "Marxist" or a "socialist" – "to me that's like saying you're a Baptist, that you belong to a sect. Some ideas are useful, others become redundant as the world changes."

The idea of bringing Chomsky to Scotland came to James Kelman, the short-story writer and novelist, when he started work on a long essay on Chomsky's work for *Edinburgh Review* magazine about two years ago. Kelman found connections between Chomsky's crystal-clear vision of radical democracy and the eighteenth-century Scottish philosophy of common sense, a school of thought once lost but rediscovered by the Edinburgh philosopher George Elder Davie, another conference speaker. While Margaret Thatcher found in the works of Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson the roots of modern conservatism, Davie – and Kelman – saw the philosophy of common sense as a useful context in which to reinvent anti-authoritarian grass-roots political ideas for a time in which Labour socialism seemed hopelessly hidebound.

The Glasgow Free University project, a loose grouping of political activists and intellectuals, took up the idea; more resources came from *Scottish Child* magazine, recently established to draw together and politicise Scotland's professional carers, teachers, "anybody interested in Scotland's future". **The event was self-financing. Its refusal of political alignment precluded interest from the Labour or nationalist movements, the Scottish Arts Council turned it down, and the event had nothing to do with the European City of Culture.** The biggest overall sponsor was a local bar, the Scotia, which did all the catering for free. Volunteers from community groups round Govan and from the Free University took on all administration.

The idea behind the event was to combine the chance to hear an expert with sessions working from people's place in the here and now. There were workshops on racism, housing, feminism, the poll tax, non-sectarian anarchism, small-press bookstalls, readings and music from local and invited artists. All the whole-group sessions, many of the smaller workshops and vox-pops from participants, who ranged from ministers and Scottish media stars to serious Situationists, were taped. A book and video cassette will be coming out soon.

**JENNY TURNER**

● The author is books editor of *City Limits* magazine.

Paul Anderson,  
c/o Kelman,  
244 West Princes St,  
Glasgow G4

15th December 1989

Dear *Paul Anderson,*

Self Determination & Power Event - Pearce Institute 10-11th Jan  
1990

Thank you for your application to the above event. You have been successful in getting a place on Day 1 (10th) and Day 2 (11th).

The enclosed programme is your ticket for the event. When you arrive, please present this at reception and we will be able to check your name against the membership list. Reception is open from 9.30 am on each of the days, when coffee will be served. As the event has attracted the limit of 300 people on each day, please try to be punctual.

You will note from the programme that the event is organised into talks, big group discussion time, small group discussions, optional workshop presentations, and informal social time with readings and music in the evenings.

The small group discussions have been designed to give everyone who attends the chance to contribute. These groups which start each afternoon will be led by an event member designated by the organisers. The groups will be made up of a cross-section of interests, and you will find a group list in the folder you get when you arrive.

Optional workshop presentations give the chance to participants to share an aspect of the event's theme from their own experience. A full list of what workshops are on offer each day will be available. Some workshop slots are still free, and we welcome further interest. Phone Keith Miller on 041-427-6398 to organise.



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MUSEUM AND ART GALLERIES SERVICE  
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RENFREWSHIRE  
PA1 2BA

Tony Sweeney Esq.  
Manager,  
The Dean Park Hotel,  
Renfrew.

Dear Mr Sweeney,

Both Fiona Michie of the Renfrew Development Company, and Drew Gibson of Renfrew District Council, recommended that I contact you. I am involved in the organising committee to bring Naom Chomsky to Glasgow and Paisley next week, and I would like to make a formal booking for Mr Chomsky and for the chairman of the Organising Committee for 4 nights: 8,9,10 and 11 January. Mr Chomsky is regarded as one of the world's foremost philosophers and we are delighted that he is able to come to Scotland during Glasgow's City of Culture celebrations. I enclose a photocopy from the Glasgow Herald for your information.

I spoke with a member of your staff, Miss Iona McIntyre, during last week and she was most helpful, showing me the type of rooms available and the various facilities which the Dean Park has to offer. On this basis can I confirm that we would be glad to book an American Twin and a Double Room for the four nights. I understand that you might also be prepared to consider some element of discount for our group, and if this was the case we would be very grateful. As a writers' co-operative we are glad of any help that we can receive. I understand that you will be at the Dean Park tomorrow (Monday) and I shall call in to discuss this matter with you, at your convenience.

We hope that Mr Chomsky's party will arrive from Glasgow Airport at approximately 1 pm.

Yours sincerely

*Joseph D. Hendry*

J.D. Hendry  
Department of Arts and Libraries  
Renfrew District Council.